

America, it's time to abolish the Electoral College | Cohen

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Earlier this month, on the first day of the new Congress, I introduced a [constitutional amendment to eliminate the antiquated Electoral College](#) and provide for the direct election of our nation's President and Vice President.

In 2016, for the second time since 2000 and for the fifth time in our history, the national popular vote winner did not become President of the United States because of the Electoral College.

The Electoral College was a solution to an 18th-Century problem that longer exists. When it was adopted, there were no national electronic news media. The need for an Electoral College was premised on the theory that citizens would have a better chance of knowing about electors from their home states than about presidential candidates from out of state. Electors chosen by the people would substitute their judgment, if necessary,

to choose the President and Vice President. In practice, that's not what has happened: electors have not shown independent judgment and superior knowledge.

The notion that citizens should be prevented from directly electing the President is antithetical to our understanding of democracy today. The existence of mass media and the Internet has made information about presidential candidates easily accessible to U.S. citizens across the country and around the world. Today, citizens have a far better chance of knowing about out-of-state presidential candidates than knowing about presidential electors from their home states. Most people do not even know who their electors are.

Since our nation's founding, we have repeatedly amended our Constitution to keep it in line with our changing circumstances and understanding of democracy. For example, in 1913, we adopted the 17th Amendment to allow citizens to directly elect their U.S. Senators. Until that time, U.S. Senators were appointed by state legislatures.

Other examples abound. The 15th Amendment was adopted to allow Americans to vote regardless of race. The 19th Amendment was adopted to allow women to vote. The 26th Amendment was adopted to allow Americans to begin voting at age 18.

It's worth noting that the genesis of the Electoral College was in part an immoral and sinful protection of slavery. That included the counting of non-voting slaves as three-fifths of a person to boost slave state populations for Congressional and Electoral College representation.

Eliminating the Electoral College would greatly benefit cities like Memphis, that cycle after cycle keep finding themselves outside of "battle ground" states where candidates devote most of their attention.

As the Founding Father Thomas Jefferson said, "I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and constitutions, but laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths uncovered and manners and opinions change, with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times."

It's time for us to eliminate this outdated institution and let citizens directly determine our future leaders.

U.S. Rep. Steve Cohen represents Tennessee's 9th Congressional District. He is the chairman of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties.